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in Tolerance



**Navigating the storm
of end time humanism**

“inTolerance”

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INTOLERANCE

NAVIGATING THE STORM OF END TIME HUMANISM

Faced with the choice of settling in a place with optimal living conditions or a poor, undeveloped area with no infrastructure, it's not difficult to guess how most of us would decide.

To put a stop to tensions in the family, Abraham had given first choice to his nephew, Lot, who had not hesitated. He chose the whole Jordan Valley, well watered and fertile, and pitched his tents near Sodom (Genesis 13:1-13).

Like him, we would probably not have given much thought to the social environment we would find ourselves in. Nor its implications for the shaping of our own attitudes and lifestyle. Who would have guessed the disastrous results in the long term?

Amos 3:7 gives us a fascinating insight into God's dealings with his world. He does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants. In Genesis 18 we see this happening as God shows Abraham the coming judgment, provoking a response from him. Abraham takes up the challenge by interceding on behalf of the people with humility and respect. He knows God's heart and so he remains before him, reminding him of his perfect justice: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25b). Six times the Lord is willing to withhold his judgment, even if there are no more than ten righteous. But not even ten are to be found.

However, God has not run out of mercy. He rescues Lot and his family, although Abraham had not asked

him to. When he can no longer spare the majority, God still has plans to rescue the minority, or even just individuals.

In Genesis 19 the situation becomes intolerable for Lot. The whole town surrounds his house, young and old demanding that he surrender the strangers spending the night under his roof. They refuse Lot's desperate and alarming offer to give them his daughters instead. They are out for one specific kind of sensual gratification – nothing else will satisfy their lust.

“This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge!” (verse 9). As a foreigner in their midst, Lot has no intention of being their judge! He only wants his guests to be spared and protected. But he and his family, a peaceful minority, now find themselves helpless in the power of an aggressive majority. Lust blinds the eyes to the needs of others. Lust is not love, for its language is violence. Without God's intervention, Lot would have met his end.

Real love warns

Lot is rescued, but has to flee without notice, leaving everything behind: his home town, his house and property, his sons-in-law and later even his wife. He is not permitted to look back. Jesus referred to Lot in connection with the signs that would precede his return:

It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all ... Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

Luke 17:28-29 and 32-33

Jesus compares the situation at the time of Lot to the signs of the end times. Since we have begun to experience some of these signs, we have a better understanding of the story. Homosexuality is nothing new. What is new is that it is deliberately and systematically promoted. New also is the pressure to accept it as a valid norm. Political correctness sees to it that society in general and law-makers in particular bow to the agenda forced on us by lobbyists.

In his love, Jesus warned of the judgment that would come. If we really loved others, we would be willing to warn them too. But who dares? Are scorn and contempt too high a price to pay? Warning means pointing out a way of escape whether it will be accepted or rejected.

The spectrum of contemporary prophecy ranges from genuine Spirit-given words to mere speculation; from uplifting messages to terrifying end time visions; from wise counsel to words of promise with an overwhelmingly positive perspective.

The majority of Biblical prophecies express God's sorrow over sin and his warnings of coming judgment – characteristics only rarely encountered in modern prophecy. Jeremiah says: "From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true." (Jeremiah 28:8-9).

To this day, prophetic wishful thinking gives rise to a false sense of security and false hopes. The end is all too often bitter disillusionment. Genuine prophetic warnings, on the other hand, can take a long time to be fulfilled or may even be annulled. An example is found in the book of Jonah, where the people of

Nineveh took the warning seriously and repented. Each time, it depends whether God finds “ten who are righteous”.

Ezekiel described the scroll he was to eat:

On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. Ezekiel 2:10

And in Ezekiel 33:6 we read:

But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.

Biblical prophecy is serious. Biblical prophecy reveals the grief in God's heart.

A settled account?

A list of warnings today would cover all sorts of issues, some easily identified. But the most serious dangers are not so easily recognized. One in particular comes packaged to look deceptively positive. Will we be conned?

The Bible is unmistakably clear that sin, if not repented of and forgiven, results in judgment and death. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is just one example. Although God is patient and long-suffering, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). We reap what we have sown. History gives us repeated evidence of this in the fall of entire civilizations. If the seed we sow brings death to millions of innocents then we will reap death for millions. This applies particularly to abortion. It will be a bitter harvest.

The hidden danger, even for Christians, lies in the fact that we are no longer able to see the link. Our

need for harmony is so great that anything in connection with punishment seems narrow-minded, harsh, unkind and judgmental. Our Christian duty to love our neighbours is at the forefront of our thinking (Matthew 22:37-39). However, the first and greatest commandment Jesus gives us sets a specific order for our love. We are to love God first and then our neighbour. There is a good reason for this. We can only truly love our neighbour if we love God first.

Unless our capacity for love is firmly anchored in God, our love for others will go askew. We will be drawn over to the wrong side without even noticing – taking a human slant rather than God’s perspective. Sympathizing with human weakness is not the same as sympathizing with human wickedness. The difference came out starkly in the early seventies when popular musicals sought to draw our sympathies towards Judas – at Jesus’ expense.

The new trend was to sympathize with evil – and soon there was no stopping the tidal wave that swept away inhibitions, paved the way for crime and brought a rising flood of indescribable blasphemy in its wake. Within the community of believers today, our faith is founded on the love of God, but we are increasingly unable to come to terms with concepts such as sin, punishment and judgment. A revelation of God in a “gentle whisper” preceded by a powerful wind, an earthquake and fire (1 Kings 19:11-12) no longer fits our mindset. Our idea nowadays is that God’s mercy automatically cancels out his holiness and righteousness, like a settled account. We no longer find it disturbing to be “in the red”.

Where hate is permitted

Our attitudes are now largely determined by a deeply rooted Christian humanism. Tolerance, together with our belief in basic human decency, has dimmed our discernment. Imperceptibly, our values have shifted.

What is the remedy? How can we regain a healthy sense of sin – even if we have nothing “bad” on our conscience? There is a short, simple prayer that can be a real help. “God, show me what sin is!” Pray this frequently and sincerely, and you’ll be surprised how quickly God answers.

God loves sinners – he is passionate about us – but at the same time he hates sin passionately. This is why he created a way out of sin. Jesus paid the ultimate price when he poured out his own lifeblood at Calvary. That’s how much we mean to him! But it’s also how seriously God takes sin and how much he hates it.

God’s adversary knows how serious sin is. That’s why he treats it so lightly. Satan’s current strategy is to pose as humanity’s best friend, including ever increasing areas in his radius of so-called tolerance and solidarity. As Christians, we are his favourite target group. And we are an increasingly soft target, learning with growing ease to acknowledge sin only as a theological concept – if at all. In practice, we make ever greater concessions and end up “on friendly terms” with sin.

Do we realize that this leads to a continual weakening of our love for God? We no longer feel the need to come daily to Jesus, the Saviour. Forgiveness no longer rekindles our love. Gradually we lose all awareness of sin. We no longer sense how it separates us from God, and how deeply it grieves him.

We cease to hate what he hates. Parallel to this runs the development of a new taboo in modern society. The very concept of sin is being undermined in the name of tolerance. Calling sin by its name can mean offending against anti-discrimination laws and even risking prosecution.

The greatest and deadliest defect in our society, in our churches and in our own lives, is sin. The damage it causes spreads like cancer, undermining and destroying our relationship with God. But by losing our relationship with God, we also lose the human dignity he gave us, and sink to the level of a consumer item. The door is flung wide open for every kind of abuse. Family and other relationships are shattered, and the breakdown of social and economic structures becomes inevitable. "Sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). And we are the ones who not only permitted this disgrace, but desired and even promoted it.

Jesus challenges us to take tough action against sin. He uses a vivid illustration to get the message across:

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Matthew 5:29-30

His aim is to bring home to us what will happen if we are soft with ourselves and refuse to take measures against sin. It's all or nothing, life or death.

Hell has scored a victory in that Jesus' warnings about hell are almost universally overlooked or played down. Are we willing to radically choose God's side? If we are, it could be a costly decision.

Recent attempts to discredit the Bible have been based on the fact that it contains reports of bloody wars, violence, sexual abuse and punishment. Typically, the crucifixion is viewed as a glorification of violence and thus potentially damaging to youth under eighteen. A storm is brewing, although its name sounds innocent enough: humanism.

Manipulated emotions

Another of the enemy's tactics has become part of our everyday experience. In our enlightened, hi-tech age it is common practice to present information in such a way as to evoke an emotional response. Under the guise of factual research, much of the news presented to us has a hidden agenda. Our sympathies are directed to certain underprivileged groups who are presented as victims. What method could be better suited to rousing our emotions and hindering rational thought?

Once our sympathies have been turned towards the needs of a specific group of people, violence becomes a regrettable but necessary trifle and supporters of terrorism are seen as peace-loving human rights activists. The more frequently our emotions are focussed on the group concerned, the greater the long-term effectiveness of these tactics.

A particularly clear example is the largely one-sided news coverage of events concerning Israel. Logically enough, the "father of lies" has a strategic interest in the one spot on the globe where, according to the Bible, Jesus will return: the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:4 and Acts 1:11-12).

A close look at what is reported, how it is reported, what is mentioned and what is omitted can be very telling. How often do certain news items appear, or

how seldom? It is easy to condemn culprits and profess solidarity with victims while clicking from news channel to news channel. A child left bleeding and helpless; the victims of wars and natural disasters; maltreated animals – they all deserve our sympathy. But do we take the trouble to check the facts? As an instrument in the hands of unscrupulous reporters our sympathies can become our weak point, putting us in a vulnerable position.

How can we steer clear of these hidden currents? How will we cope when the horrific disasters are no longer presented in the media but are actually taking place around us? Will we be totally at the mercy of our emotions? What will we do when we are no longer able to discern evil and confront it as such, or when we are incapable of reacting with God's love and patience?

Weak – but strong in God!

Strength, help and comfort are in God alone. He and he alone loves us with a passion that never changes and he knows only too well how little pressure we can bear. He understands better than we do the damaging long-term effects of our consumer society and the resulting psychological problems. He understands and suffers with the countless numbers of children and young people, adrift and helpless with no one to guide them. He longs to enfold us in his love, confused emotions and all, anchoring us firmly within himself. The tossed and battered ship of our feelings cannot easily be torn away from a mooring place that is kept safe by God himself – not even by the mighty waves of human tragedy and natural disaster.

Just as rescue procedures are in place for the event of a disaster, so too our heavenly Father has already

prepared a rescue plan for each one of us personally, a plan that takes our weaknesses and inabilities into account.

Only one thing can effectively hinder God's plan for us: our own stubbornness, our insistence on doing things our way and in our own strength, and our always being right. In other words, we need to reach the point of weakness where we admit our desperate need of God. Then we will learn to cast our anchor on him and will grow strong, our eyes fixed on him and his power to help us. "Let me be weak in myself but strong in you!" is a prayer that touches a secret of the kingdom of God.

Jesus did not come for those who are strong and self-sufficient. He came for those of us who admit that we cannot free ourselves from our own weaknesses, and unconditionally hand everything over to him. Our real strength lies in our helplessness, our victory in our defeat, our greatness in our limitations.

In one of his parables, Jesus takes a mustard seed to illustrate the kingdom of God. There is nothing impressive about such a tiny seed. It is barely visible to the naked eye and totally unsuited to the limelight. But the dynamics of life that God has hidden away in a seed surpass every kind of worldly success. "The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation" (Isaiah 60:22).

Jesus will never leave his "little flock" unaided or unequipped, least of all when we face the hour of our greatest suffering and testing. He is coming back soon and he is perfecting the body of Christ to be his bride. The end will be like the beginning. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit that began at Pentecost will lead Christians in the end times into an apostolic authority like – or even surpassing – that of the early Church.

The best is still to come!

In all the uncertainties and conflicts of our times, those who truly belong to Jesus will bear the same characteristics that distinguished the early Church in Jerusalem. With the establishment of a network of mutual aid and sharing between churches, denominational boundaries will fade into insignificance and we will be united in our Lord Jesus Christ as never before.

The Church of the end times will live in the strength of Jesus' sacrifice through receiving Holy Communion – Christians will hold fast to the living Word of God and stand firm, loyal and patient, to the end. Their testimony will be confirmed by signs and wonders and those who are being saved will be added daily to their numbers. They will be willing to pay the price of their calling. Of them it is written that “they overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:11).

Our comfortable, middle-of-the-road brand of Christianity will cease, replaced by the fire of first love for Jesus.

In the last days it will be easy to spot the difference between those who serve God and those who do not. To those who are fully committed to him, he will be a Father, treating them as his treasured possession. They will have his undivided attention, especially when they are in need (see Malachi 3:16-18).

Under the pressure of end time events, Jesus will gather together his bride, the persecuted body of Christ. Just as global computer networking is daily extending its sphere of operation, so also the heavenly network of those who love him is expanding into every people-group, nation and language. In

God's plan, the entire history of the human race will reach its climax in the preparation and perfection of his bride. Surely it will be in the furnace of affliction that the Lord will reveal his power and glory through those who are fully committed to him. How could it be otherwise. He is the same Lord yesterday, today and for ever, and he encourages us with the words:

O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build ... your foundations with sapphires ... and all your walls of precious stones.

Isaiah 54:11-12

In the midst of brokenness and misery, the indestructible glory of God will shine out and the radiance of the City of God will appear for all to see. When violence and terror take over and chaos ensues, when we are surrounded by death and destruction, the hidden treasure in the fragile "jars of clay" of our personal lives and of our churches and fellowships will be evident as never before. It will no longer matter that the vessel is unimpressive: only the treasure it contains will count. We ourselves will be insignificant and will have nothing more to boast about, and all the glory will be given to our God in Jesus Christ, to whom alone it is due.

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!

Revelation 5:13

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